



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges

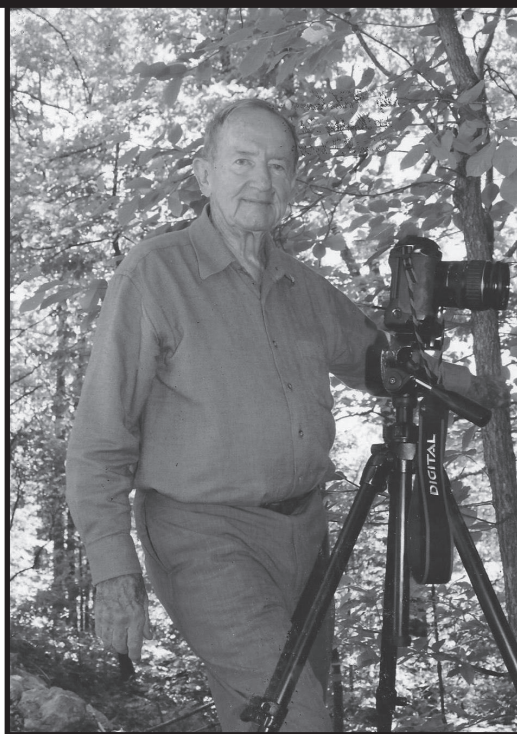


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Author, attorney and conservationist Tommy Wyche, instrumental in breathing life into downtown Greenville and protecting the Blue Ridge Mountains from development, recently passed away at the age of 88.

Thank Tommy Wyche for Blue Ridge conservation

Greenville attorney played large role protecting Appalachian landscape in S.C.

One day soon when you're strolling Greenville's bustling Main Street on your way to dinner or a show, take a few moments to thank Tommy Wyche.

One Saturday in the near future when you're hiking a trail in Jocassee Gorges or simply marveling at the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains, say a word of gratitude for Tommy Wyche.

Wyche, who died Jan. 23, was an attorney who used his extraordinary talents and sweeping vision to reshape Greenville and forever protect much of nature's beauty that lies in the mountains beyond. He was a renaissance man in the truest sense of the term, someone equally adept at so many undertakings that it is difficult to catalog all of them.

A love for the outdoors and a deep commitment to preserving nature accounted for part of Wyche's lasting legacy. He understood the urgency of protecting the breathtaking beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and he

devoted equal amounts of time and passion to ensuring that much of what we now call the Blue Wall would not fall to a developer's careless ax.

The story has been told that on a trip to California many decades ago, Wyche saw what could happen when development was allowed to first encroach on nature's beauty, and then to overrun it. As his son Brad Wyche has said, Jocassee Gorges, Caesars Head State Park, Jones Gap State Park, the Greenville Watershed and hundreds of privately conserved acres "wouldn't exist today without Dad's vision, commitment and hard work." Indeed, it wouldn't.

"All of us lost something when we lost Tommy," said Greenville developer Bob Hughes. "People who never knew of him or heard of him lost something because they benefit from his vision and his hard work. We need a Tommy Wyche and every community should be blessed to have one, and we will miss him in ways we will never be smart enough to know."

(Excerpted from the Jan. 27-28, 2015 issues of The Greenville News) 



The beautiful view from the top of South Carolina at Sassafras Mountain will be more accessible thanks to a \$350,000 donation from Duke Energy. Construction of the observation platform will likely begin in late summer, and should take less than six months to complete. (Duke Energy photo by Ryan Mosier)

South Carolina's highest peak gets helping hand from Duke Energy

Utility challenges others to help fund Sassafras Mountain platform

Visitors to South Carolina's highest peak will soon have access to a spectacular panorama of the surrounding countryside thanks to a \$350,000 gift from Duke Energy.

The contribution is the first step towards building an observation platform and other planned amenities at the top of Sassafras Mountain. The funds allow construction of the observation platform to begin.

The donation was formally presented at the Feb. 6 meeting of the S.C. Natural Resources Board in Columbia.

Funding for the Sassafras Mountain amenities was committed as part of the Relicensing Agreement for Duke Energy's Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project, which includes the hydroelectric stations at Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee.

"Duke Energy has been a long-time partner with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to provide public recreation since the 1960s," said Alvin Taylor, the

agency's director. "We have worked closely with Duke Energy on numerous projects involving hunting, fishing, boating and habitat protection. Building this platform is the first step in maximizing the natural beauty of the Palmetto State's tallest peak for generations to come."

"Sassafras Mountain is a special natural asset, and this project fits right in with our mission of environmental stewardship," said Clark Gillespy, South Carolina president of Duke Energy. "Partnerships like this ensure that the natural beauty and wonders of South Carolina are protected and shared with

generations to come."

With the Duke Energy contribution, fund-raising for the Sassafras Mountain observation platform, which will allow views into North Carolina and Georgia, has reached about \$500,000, sufficient to move forward with construction of the platform. Construction of the platform will likely begin mid- to late-summer, and should take less than six months. The construction of other amenities, such as restrooms, a picnic area and a barrier-free trail to the observation platform will require additional fund-raising.

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Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Program gets underway

Proposals now being accepted

Through July 31, Duke Energy will accept applications from governmental agencies and non-profit organizations for the newly established Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Program.

The Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Program (KTHEP) will fund projects that create, enhance and protect aquatic and wildlife habitats in the Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee watersheds. The KTHEP was launched last fall as part of the Keowee-Toxaway Relicensing Agreement that Duke Energy entered into with 16 other stakeholder organizations during the Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing process.

A similar habitat enhancement program was successfully established in 2005 for Duke Energy's Catawba-Wateree Hydroelectric Project. Nearly \$1.9 million has been awarded to fund projects in the Catawba-Wateree reservoirs including installation of osprey/heron nesting platforms, installation of in-reservoir fish attractors, establishment of water willow beds and other riparian vegetation, and riparian land protection. The signatories to the Keowee-Toxaway Relicensing Agreement designed the KTHEP to encourage



The Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Program will fund projects designed to help wildlife and fish in the Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee watersheds. (Photo by Dave Fletcher)

local resource agencies and non-profit organizations to undertake similar activities at Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee.

The KTHEP is funded by Duke Energy and property owners adjoining Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee who seek permits from Duke Energy under the Shoreline Management Plan. KTHEP fee payments must accompany Shoreline Management Plan permit applications. Funds for the KTHEP are managed and administered by the Foothills Community Foundation, an Anderson-based organization serving the philanthropic needs

of South Carolina for more than 15 years.

Proposals will be reviewed by a Proposal Review Committee composed of representatives from Relicensing Agreement signatory organizations. The Proposal Review Committee will make funding recommendations to Duke Energy, and approved projects will receive the funds likely no later than the end of November.

The Relicensing Agreement signatories believe the KTHEP will result in significant habitat improvements in the immediate Keowee-Jocassee watershed for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial based species. For more information about the KTHEP, or to submit a KTHEP proposal, please visit www.Duke-Energy.com or call Duke Energy at (800) 443-5193. ❁

Duke Energy contribution will help build Sassafras platform

Continued from page 2

"We challenge other corporations to follow Duke Energy's lead and join us in this effort, because the Sassafras Mountain project is important to the citizens of South Carolina," Taylor said.

Sassafras Mountain, in addition to being the highest point in South Carolina at 3,553 feet, sits on the border of South Carolina and North Carolina and is also on the Eastern Continental Divide. It is the separation point for three distinct watersheds—two of these watersheds drain into the Atlantic Ocean and another

travels to the Gulf of Mexico. The 77-mile Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org) passes over the top of Sassafras on its journey between Table Rock and Oconee state parks.

Partners in the Sassafras Mountain effort in addition to DNR and Duke Energy include Pickens County, Clemson University, The Conservation Fund, The Highpointers Club, the Foothills Trail Conference, and the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund.

For more information on how you can help, visit the Sassafras Mountain project website: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/sassafrasmountain.html>. ❁

Contributions live on in monument near Jocassee dam

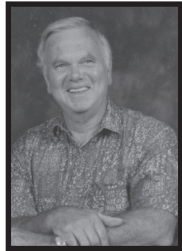
Longtime Duke employee honored 10 years ago in ceremony

Ten years ago, on May 11, 2005, a brass plaque and rock monument were dedicated to the late Charles McSwain on the Pickens side of the Jocassee dam, a dedication attended by a group of about 20 people.

The plaque reads: "In memory of Charles McSwain (1938-2004) and in appreciation of his 35 years of dedicated service to Duke Power hydroelectric generation. His professionalism, knowledge and compassion for people set a standard in this Keowee-Toxaway hydro area that all who follow would be wise to uphold."

A weeping cherry tree was also planted at the site.

McSwain was the superintendent of Duke Power's Keowee and Jocassee generation stations from 1969 until his retirement in 1993. Before his arrival at the Keowee-Toxaway project, he also served at Duke Power (later Duke



Charles McSwain



The monument to Charles McSwain was dedicated in 2005 on the Jocassee Dam. Shown alongside the monument are McSwain's widow, Geri McSwain, and their two children, Mark McSwain and Maria McSwain Price.

Energy) posts in Hendersonville, N.C., and in Charlotte, N.C. After officially retiring from Duke Energy in 1993, he served a two-year stint in Argentina as manager of maintenance and production at the massive Piedra del Aguia hydro station, part of a consortium led by Duke Energy.

John Garton, retired biologist with Duke Energy, said McSwain oversaw several conservation initiatives in partnership with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources in the Jocassee region, including the reintroduction of peregrine falcons and Duke Energy's planting and management of power plant lands for wildlife. ❁

Clemson Extension agent receives prestigious conservation award

Upstate Forever honors Cathy Reas Foster, lauds her 'vibrant personality and high-energy approach'

Cathy Reas Foster, Clemson Extension Service's natural resources agent for Pickens County, has been named Public Servant of the Year by Upstate Forever.

Foster was presented the award on Feb. 24 at the conservation organization's ForeverGreen Annual Awards Luncheon in Greenville. Upstate Forever honors individuals and organizations for significant achievements in the fields of land conservation, clean water, clean air, sustainable development, recycling, public service and volunteer work.

As a hydrogeologist, Foster is also a co-coordinator of the Stormwater Partners for Pickens and Anderson counties. She is part of the Carolina Clear team and is a member of numerous non-profit conservation organizations.

"I am honored to receive this award from Upstate Forever and share it with everyone who made this possible,"



Cathy Foster

says Foster, who won the South Carolina Wildlife Federation Conservation Educator of the Year award in 2014. "Helping people and organizations work together to conserve natural resources is important for healthy and sustainable communities, and I am happy to be a part of that."

Known throughout the Upstate for her vibrant personality and high-energy approach, Foster goes above and beyond to educate residents about environmental issues. One day she's painting rain barrels and setting up compost bins. Another day she's hanging tree tags and installing rain gardens. She also promotes the use of native plants in residential yards.

All this while occasionally finding time to backpack sections of the Appalachian Trail.

"Cathy's enthusiasm for conservation, and specifically recycling and reusing, is exciting and contagious," says Angela Viney, development director of Upstate Forever. "She is always finding ways to repurpose everyday materials. Her interaction with children as she teaches them about humans' impact on our rivers and streams captures their attention and sparks enthusiasm for change." ❁

Sassafras Mountain becomes weather station

Weather information can be retrieved on-line, or visitors may scan with smartphones

A new automated weather station on South Carolina's highest point, Sassafras Mountain in northern Pickens County, will fill important data gaps in the mountain region.

To view weather conditions at Sassafras Mountain, visit: <http://www.nc-climate.ncsu.edu/m/?station=sass>

State Climatologist Dr. Hope Mizzell is excited to get the first dependable wind speed data from the mountains. Most mountain weather information previously came from Caesars Head in northern Greenville County, where wind speed isn't measured.

"We had no wind data in the mountains, and very little rainfall data," said Mizzell.

The new Sassafras Mountain weather station, which went online in December 2014, was installed near the planned site of a new overlook platform at the state's highest point, 3,563 feet, along the border with North Carolina. Visitors will be able to scan their smartphones over a QR code posted near the weather station to see real-time temperature and wind data, according to Mizzell.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources, which includes the State Climatology Office, coordinated and installed the new weather station on Sassafras Mountain. The initial installation includes the equipment, an Internet connection and one year of maintenance for the automated station. The State Climatology Office worked with the N.C. Environment and Climate Observing Network to set up the station. That network operates 30 automated stations in

' State Climatologist Dr. Hope Mizzell is excited to get the first dependable wind speed data from the mountains.'



The Sassafras Mountain weather station measures temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, barometric pressure and precipitation. (Photo by Heyward Douglass)

North Carolina.

The weather station will measure temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, barometric pressure and precipitation. The information will inform forecasts and emergency management.

Because official weather stations and equipment have been limited, Mizzell expects the new station could lead to some record-breaking

daily low temperatures and annual rainfall statistics. Wet weather systems can dump heavy rain on the downslopes of the mountains as they enter South Carolina. ❁

Music, history and nature come together

Hagood Mill history intertwined
with Cherokee and British,
dates back to late 1700s

By Reed Severance

In the days of our Founding Fathers, the land was there for the taking. The Cherokee lived in Keowee and Eastatoee. They walked a trail, which is now the sandy lane in front of Hagood Mill, and was once the main road from Pickens to the Rosman, N.C., area. Before the Cherokee, there were other people at the site etching petroglyphs on the big rock that was the base of the first Hagood Mill dam. But that's another story.

The Cherokee traded with the British, and the Brits protected them from the Creek Indians. Thus the Cherokee were on the losing side in the Revolution. Their lands were opened to white settlement, and by 1790, Mr. Jennings had constructed a mill. His widow sold it in around 1825 to Col. Benjamin Hagood of Twelve Mile Plantation. He and his kindred never left here as they are buried a couple of miles from the mill bearing their name.

As the area gained population, more capacity was needed and a new mill was built in 1845. Two sets of granite stones were driven by the 20-foot overshot wooden waterwheel. The dam, now long gone, was about one-quarter-mile upstream and water delivered via a large sluice dug into the rocky earth. The beams were hewn with broad and felling axes. There was sweat and swearing to be sure as the post and beam structure was raised and pegs driven home to hold fast mortise and tenon joints.

Holding fast yet today. Their toil is our link to a time we never knew, but which makes us who we are. The mill is roughly crafted but solid, not adorned but with purpose. The very portrait of the men that built her.

Life-giving water rolls the wheel again to drive the gears, to drive the belts, to drive the shafts, to rotate the stones to grind the grains to build bodies and minds which come to



Hagood Mill Historic Site & Folklife Center hosts a variety of events for military and living history re-enactors, nature specialists, technology experts, crafts guilds and other special people.

see what this mill is about. They see the wheel turn; they hear the water and the slamming of the sifters; they smell the sweet aroma of fresh ground oats; they feel the mill vibrate. Some are quiet, some are loud. Some do not ask questions but many do. Some remember being in this very place 60 years ago with their Pa or Grandpa. They come and learn, share stories, make memories, and buy the ground grains. Without really thinking about it at all, living a piece of their ancestor's life.

If these walls could talk....

(Reed Severance is a Miller at Hagood Mill. You can follow Hagood Mill events at www.visitpickenscounty.com as well as FaceBook and many other social media sites.)

Every third Saturday is 'Music in the Mountains'

It's *Music in the Mountains* all year long at Hagood Mill Historic Site & Folklife Center. Every third Saturday through the year traditional musicians from the Upstate area gather to celebrate 100-year-old music from the mountain culture that surrounds Pickens County's beloved Hagood Mill. Yes, it's true, the Blue Ridge mountains begin right here in South Carolina at Hagood Mill. When you leave Pickens



Charlotte Anderson demonstrates her beekeeping skills at Hagood Mill on the third Saturday of each month throughout the year.

her at Hagood Mill in Pickens County



variety of events. From time to time, the site plays host to specialists such as the Carolina Raptor Society, primitive demonstrations.

on U.S. Highway 178 North and cross the beginnings of the Twelve Mile River, you approach Hagood Mill and you're in the very first mountain community of the historic Blue Ridge chain of communities.

Hagood Mill is rapidly becoming one of the top heritage tourism destinations in the Upstate. It's home to the celebrated South Carolina Fiddling' Championship on September's third Saturday every year. And through the year you'll hear old time mountain music, bluegrass, Celtic, singer-songwriter songs, and soulful old upcountry blues..... AND, don't forget the popular *KidsFest* on the third Saturday in March. Come, bring your children and grandchildren, and watch them join the band and play old time music.

You can follow Hagood Mill events at www.visitpickenscounty.com as well as FaceBook and many other social media sites.

Share a touch of Appalachian history with honeybees
By Charlotte Anderson

Pickens County boasts a varied topography of flat lands, gentle rolling hills and soaring mountains. Here you

can find the humble honeybee going about her daily activities. She cares not for the troubles of mankind gathering nectar and pollen for her colony from the blossoms of the blackberry brambles, the stately tulip poplar tree and the prized nectar of the sourwood trees adorning the mountains in June and July. Honeybees are not native to the United States but were brought over by colonists and then spread into the forests of the new world.

When the early settlers arrived in upstate South Carolina, they found the honey bee had already made the journey. The many lakes and streams in our area provide cool clear drinking water perfect for growing crops. Beekeeping has a rich tradition in our area. The Cherokee were known to manage bee colonies and use beeswax as a trade item. Area settlers understood the value of managing honeybees and almost every community would have a beekeeper in their midst. Honeybees helped to pollinate vegetable gardens and fruit trees. They also provided honey as sweetener and beeswax for candles and waterproofing.

Today, South Carolina boasts more than 3,000 small-scale beekeepers with a strong presence in Pickens County. Feral colonies in the wild were mostly wiped out by pests and disease in the early 1990s. Managed colonies provide local citizens with pollination of vegetables and fruits and the opportunity to purchase local honey at your favorite roadside stand or directly from the beekeeper.

Each third Saturday you will find the beekeeping tent (with Master Beekeeper Charlotte Anderson) at the Hagood Mill Folklife Center Festivities along with other "hill skill" demonstrations. All of the demonstrators enjoy sharing a touch of Appalachian history with visitors from around the world.

The future of the honeybee is under pressure from environmental issues, as well as, pests and disease. Pickens County can boast of a vital beekeeping community working to protect one of our favorite citizens... "our honeybees."
(Charlotte Anderson is a Master Beekeeper with Carolina Honeybees Farm.)



Honeybees help to pollinate vegetable gardens and fruit trees. Beekeeping has a rich tradition in our area, on display each third Saturday at Hagood Mill. (Photos courtesy of Charlotte Anderson)

It was a 'Big Year' for birds on Lake Jocassee

Mid-winter eagle count sets new record on mountain lake

By Brooks Wade

"Science isn't always fun." That's what Tim Lee said, park naturalist for the Natural Bridge Wilderness Area, at 10 a.m. on a cold January morning. Surely no one could blame him. It was 38 degrees on the shore of Lake Jocassee, as Tim, Scott Stegenga, park naturalist for Table Rock State Park, and myself were about to embark on the annual January inventory of bald eagles on Lake Jocassee. 38 degrees, overcast, and breezy to boot. I don't think anyone was expecting to have any fun this day.

As a Florida boy, with thin blood to match, I had on most everything I could find in my closet. Five layers below the waist, five above, plus a wool hat and hood. I looked like I had suddenly gained 50 pounds. Scott and Tim, on the other hand, looked like old hands at this and dressed more appropriately, looking more like fluffed-out birds on a cold winter's day than the penguin I was clearly mimicking. So, suited up and ready, off we went into the frigid morning.

It was not long after, about a half hour from the dock, and despite the inclement conditions, that wonder simply took the wheel away. Just what is it about wonder anyway? How does it so gracefully take away all discomfort on a bitter winter's day? Not that I'm complaining, of course. We saw our first eagles, one adult and one juvenile, well up the Devils Fork arm of the lake, not far from Devils Fork State Park. Those two matched the entire eagle count from last year, but we were just beginning. We had 90 miles of shoreline to cover, after all, cold or no cold, windless or windy.

From there on, hardly a word of discomfort was uttered, as the wonder of Lake Jocassee in winter had us all in her grip. With apologies to Tim and Scott, I must admit there were some awkward attempts at dancing in full winter

attire, to stay warm of course, certainly not for frolic. This was a proper scientific census, mind you.

On to the count: 14 bald eagles! That sets the record for most bald eagles counted on these annual January censuses. And that's not all. 121 loons, 105 horned grebes, 463 ring-billed gulls, and 15 other species were sighted, including two peregrine falcons, one perched oh so nicely on the outstretched limb of a tall, dead snag, for all the world to see. Nature is like that, sometimes, and wonder too. They work together, don't you know.

Loons

There is more to Lake Jocassee than just its beautiful waterfalls, you know. It is simply an otherworldly place in winter. Admittedly, winter is perhaps the most beautiful time of year to visit the falls, but it's the bird life in winter that I find near mesmerizing. Eagles aloft, and on the

surface, horned grebes, ring-billed gulls, and common loons, and their associated hangers on, of course. Not that there is anything remotely common about the poorly named common loon.

Lake Jocassee is believed to have the largest, most observable population of loons in winter of any of the Southeastern inland reservoirs. Cold, deep, clear and full of herring and shad, loons find it a perfect place to spend the winter. Now, after years of trying to draw the attention of the scientific community to the avian wonderland which is Lake Jo in winter, we are getting due attention. Last winter a field researcher from the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) in Maine spent a day on the lake with me, surveying the possibility of using Lake Jo as a location for studying the behavior of loons in winter.

Loons are probably the most studied bird in North America, but most of the knowledge gained is about their breeding season behavior. There is still much



Fourteen bald eagles were counted on Lake Jocassee during the mid-winter bald eagle count, a new record! Also counted were 121 loons, 105 horned grebes, 463 ring-billed gulls, and 15 other species were sighted, including two peregrine falcons. (Photo by Doug Young)

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Daring Duo

A bench along the Whitewater River, on the Foothills Trail in northern Oconee County, was recently dedicated by Duke Energy's Bad Creek Hydro Project to John Garton (left), retired Duke Energy biologist, and Skip Still, retired wildlife biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. The plaque on the bench reads: "Thank You John and Skip For Your Dedication and Effort in Preserving This Great Land, The Jocassee Gorges."

Loon tagging on cold February night not for the faint of heart!

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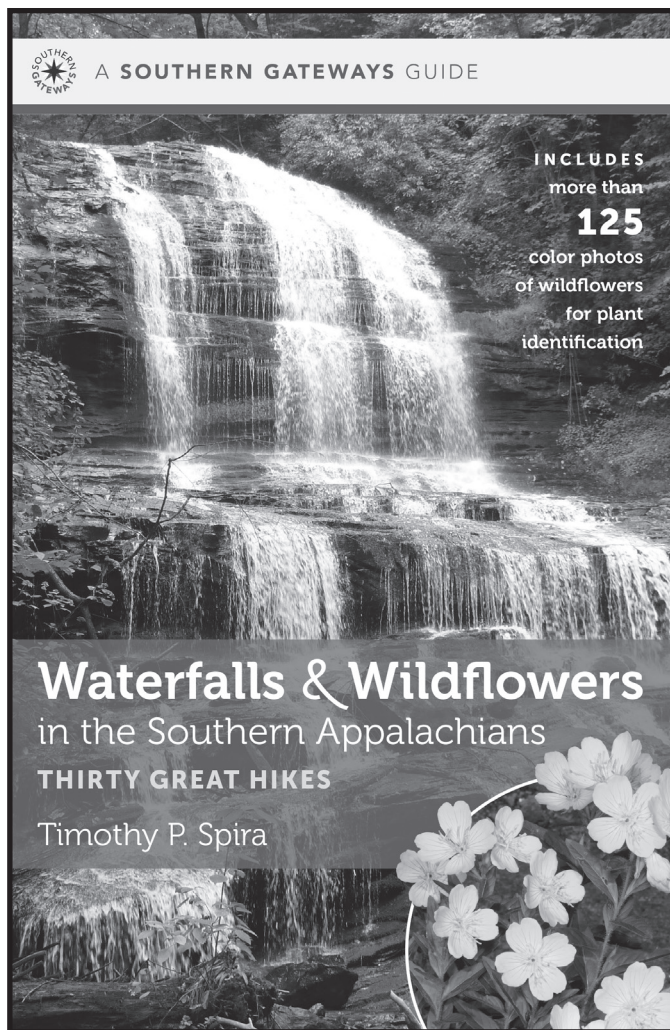
to learn about where they go and what they do in winter. This February, Dr. Jim Paruk, also from the BRI, and America's leading loon field researcher, came to Lake Jo for the first loon banding ever done here. At night. All night. In February. It's not for everyone, believe me, but as a citizen loonologist, I was honored and thrilled to be the guide and assistant for a night of loon tagging. Dr. Paruk and his field assistant were pretty thrilled too, and being from Maine, not nearly as chilled as I was. Properly

' Loons are probably the most studied bird in North America, but most of the knowledge gained is about their breeding season behavior. There is still much to learn about where they go and what they do in winter.'

enthralled by the wonder of Lake Jocassee in winter.

There are plans in the making for a three-year study of loons in winter on Lake Jo, so stay tuned for further reports.

(Brooks Wade is a member of the board of directors for the Foothills Trail Conference and the Friends of Jocassee. He is also the owner, along with his wife, Kay, of Jocassee Lake Tours, an eco-tourism business based near Lake Jocassee. For more information, visit JocasseeLakeTours.com or give them a call at (864) 280-5501.) ❁



Tim Spira's new book takes hikers to gorgeous waterfalls in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia, and includes many hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Clemson botanist authors new book

'Thirty Great Hikes' book will delight lovers of waterfalls and wildflowers

If you love waterfalls, naturalist Tim Spira's new book features some of the best hikes in the Southern Appalachians. And if you love plants--or simply would like to learn more about them--you will be in hiking heaven


"Waterfalls & Wildflowers in the Southern Appalachians: Thirty Great Hikes" links waterfalls and wildflowers in a spectacularly beautiful region famous for both. Leading you to gorgeous waterfalls in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia, the book includes many hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. As he surveys one of America's most biologically diverse regions, Spira introduces hikers to the "natural communities" approach for identifying and understanding plants within the context of the habitats they occupy--equipping hikers to see and interpret landscapes in a new way.

Each of the 30 hikes includes:

- a detailed map and GPS coordinates
- a lively trail description highlighting the plants you are most likely to see, as well as birds and other animals along the way
- an associated plant species list

Also featured:

- beautiful color photographs of 30 destination waterfalls, 125 plants, and more
- detailed descriptions of 125 key plant species
- 22 drawings to help identify plant structures
- a glossary of botanical terms

(About the author: Timothy P. Spira, retired professor of biology at Clemson University, is the author of Wildflowers & Plant Communities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and Piedmont: A Naturalist's Guide to the Carolinas, Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia.) 



"Ranger Scott," as Scott Stegenga is often referred to at Table Rock State Park, is a talented naturalist, leading walks of all varieties in the Upstate and also joining scientific inquiries such as the mid-winter bald eagle survey on Lake Jocassee.

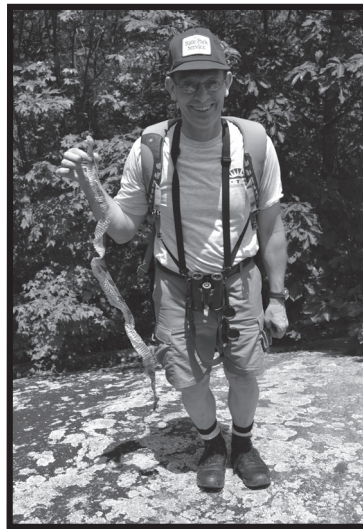
Table Rock State Park ranger likes the variety in his job

Scott Stegenga recently celebrated 25 years at iconic Upstate park

Every day is a new adventure for Scott Stegenga, park ranger at Table Rock State Park in Pickens County.

Stegenga, a native of Minnesota, celebrated his 25th year at the park in November 2014. His job basically is caring for the park. That could be anything from catching snakes in the park for display in the Nature Center, to trail monitoring. Stegenga is responsible for making sure the extensive hiking trail system is safe for park visitors. In addition, he interprets park resources and makes sure those resources are used the right way.

Stegenga said the work on the hiking trails can be hard and time consuming. It often requires moving



Scott Stegenga, a member of the board of directors for the Foothills Trail Conference, holds a rattlesnake skin on Pinnacle Mountain during a 2014 Foothills Trail event. (Photo by Heyward Douglass)

heavy rocks and carrying chain saws up the trail to clear fallen trees or branches.

"The most appealing part of my job," Stegenga said, "is the combination of being outdoors and every day is a little bit different so it is the variety, every day is different."

The cabins in the park were built by the Civilian Conservation Corpsmen in the 1930s. Stegenga said they are currently being freshened up but will keep the rustic appeal.

Stegenga is building a trail that will go to the top of Stool Mountain but he said it is a work in progress.

"There is so much emphasis on cabins and other facilities right now, Stool is not a top priority," Stegenga said. "One day it will come around and I hope I will be here to see it."

(Odell Suttle of Fountain Inn is a freelance writer, hiking enthusiast and loves spending time in South Carolina state parks.) ❁



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S.C. Department of Natural Resources

Alvin A. Taylor, Director

Editor: Greg Lucas

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Last chance for Sassafras brick paver donations

Funds raised will help build platform atop South Carolina's highest point

South Carolinians have a unique and short-lived opportunity to place their name or the name of a loved one on a brick paver atop Sassafras Mountain, the highest point in the state. Proceeds from these sales will go toward building an observation platform and other facilities on top of the mountain.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has gathered almost \$500,000 in private donations to construct a viewing platform with an unparalleled view of the Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia. Brick paver donations have generated about \$30,000 and ground breaking is planned for mid-2015. Brick paver donations will only be accepted until early summer. Bricks may be designated in honor or memory of a child, friend, or loved one. This is a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for special recognition on the highest point in South Carolina.

Duke Energy, The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund, The Felburn Foundation and anonymous donors have contributed more than \$450,000 toward the project. DNR is still seeking major donations to complete the comprehensive improvements on Sassafras that will be open to the public and provide a special educational opportunity for school children of all ages.

"The beauty of Sassafras Mountain is a part of every South Carolinians' heritage, and we want everyone to have a chance to help build this observation tower, from schoolchildren to business executives," said Alvin A. Taylor, DNR director.

In addition to being the highest point in South Carolina at 3,553 feet, Sassafras Mountain sits on the state line with North Carolina, is along the Continental Divide, and is one of the important features

of the Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org), a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. Other amenities would feature new trails, including a barrier-free section, picnic areas and restrooms.



Visit www.dnr.sc.gov and
click on the Sassafras brick
icon to purchase a brick.